



## INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	April 22, 2021
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance (HSC21014) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
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<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

### COUNCIL DIRECTION

Not Applicable

### INFORMATION

Since 2018, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) has taken steps to reform the delivery of social assistance. Strategies initiated to date include service delivery modernization, efforts to improve coordination across ministries, reduce administrative burdens and employment services integration. Linkages between the strategies include emphasis on the importance of life stabilization, employment supports and recognizing the local context.

On February 11, 2021, MCCSS outlined a renewed long-term vision for social assistance transformation in Ontario. An overview of the vision and timeline is attached as Appendix "A" to Report HSC21014. Key elements of the vision include maintaining person-centred services within municipalities to better support life stabilization and improved outcomes, and a shift of administrative services that could benefit from further automation to the Province. In addition to their current client caseload, municipal Ontario Works (OW) case workers will provide life stabilization supports to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients starting with dependant adults. This

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OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

increased caseload, as well as changes to how employment services are provided, are currently being prototyped in Hamilton.

There is no immediate impact as a result of these developments. Implementation of this long-term vision for social assistance transformation will take place over several years. Learning and testing will continue in 2021 and 2022, including Hamilton's involvement in the current prototypes. Full implementation of the vision will begin in 2022 and continue through 2024.

## **Background**

In July 2018, MCCSS announced intentions to implement a new social assistance program to improve an existing "patchwork" system. In November 2018, a high-level strategic framework was announced which included emphasis on simplified rates, local flexibility, life stabilization supports, and employment supports focused on empowering individuals. Additionally, key priorities included a coordinated multi-ministry approach, reduced administrative burdens and continued service delivery modernization so front-line staff can spend more time working with people to address complex needs.

In February 2019, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) along with MCCSS announced a plan to integrate Employment Services between OW, ODSP, and Employment Ontario. Hamilton is one of the three regions working with both Ministries to prototype the model (Report HSC20005(a)) and inform the final design before it is implemented province-wide.

In the past year, Hamilton has adopted several modernization technologies developed by MCCSS to streamline administration of OW. These include implementation of the MyBenefits digital application (app) for clients, electronic document management that eliminated paper client files, and the reloadable payment card to reduce the number of cheques issued monthly. In addition, the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department advised Council on October 5, 2020 through an Information Update that Hamilton would be prototyping the centralized online application and the risk-based automated eligibility review system with the Province.

## **Future Direction**

The provincial vision outlines strategies for a new social assistance delivery model that allows frontline workers to focus on individualized supports at the local level and make it easier for people to navigate the system. This service delivery vision identifies municipalities as key partners for expanded life stabilization efforts.

Local case workers will focus on needs assessments, discretionary benefits issuance, service planning and warm referrals to community supports including job-readiness programs, housing, childcare, skills training and mental health services. Hamilton is

currently working with MCCSS as a prototype municipality for life stabilization to inform the final design before it is implemented province-wide. When fully implemented, local OW case workers will also provide life stabilization services to ODSP clients as well as their current OW clients.

Client services that are more administrative in nature and which can be streamlined or automated will be delivered by the Province. Currently, Hamilton is a prototype municipality for a streamlined application system and automated risk-based eligibility determination. Local intake staff will focus efforts on the harder to serve clients and higher risk eligibility decisions and have reduced involvement with routine applications that can be well served with the automated, centralized intake approach. In addition, the delivery of monthly financial assistance payments to OW clients will be managed by the Province.

### **Estimated Timelines**

The Ministry has provided a high-level timeline for implementation of the renewed long-term vision for social assistance in Ontario. A summary of the phased approach is as follows:

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|----------------------|--|
| Phase 1              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2020 - 2022</li><li>• Learning and Testing phase</li><li>• Focus on prototyping changes</li></ul>  |
| Phase 2              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2022 - 2024</li><li>• Roll-out phase</li><li>• Realigning service delivery province-wide</li><li>• Municipally delivered life stabilization for OW and ODSP dependant adults</li><li>• Consolidation of financial assistance by the Province</li></ul> |
| Human Services Model | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2024 &amp; beyond</li><li>• New human services model</li><li>• Broadened community access to case workers</li></ul>  |

The Ministry has described their timeline as ambitious, with urgency partly related to anticipated needs and new challenges facing Ontarians during the province's economic recovery from COVID-19.

### **Financial Impact**

There is no budget impact at this time. It is anticipated that longer term budget impacts will be discussed in the 2022 Service Contract discussion, which could begin in late 2021 or early 2022.

Factors that will impact the 2022 Service Contract and budget discussions will include:

- the caseload impact on OW related to the COVID-19 economic recovery (Hamilton residents currently in receipt of temporary federal benefit programs may increase the OW caseload when those benefits expire and/or employment opportunities do not rebound quickly);
- workload related to the provision of life stabilization case management by municipal OW staff to ODSP clients;
- increased focus by municipal OW case workers on life stabilization related services;
- the administration and delivery of monthly financial assistance centrally by the Province; and,
- the workload impact of centralized intake and risk-based eligibility decisions.

#### **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix A to Report HSC21014 - Social Assistance: Where We're Headed